

COMPARATIVE PROMOTION POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

The Agency has operated under a policy of competitive selection for promotion. An employee's performance, qualifications, experience and value to the Agency are competitively evaluated. Those employees who have been downgraded without personal cause are given competitive consideration for promotion to their former grades. Each career service is a competitive area for promotion for the employees in that service if necessary because of differences in occupation or function. Promotions are limited to one-grade advancements, except by specific recommendations to and approval of the Director of Personnel. Competitive promotion evaluation of personnel in Grades GS-09 through GS-14 is done at least annually. Employees in Grades GS-08 and below are evaluated for promotion when the heads of career services consider it appropriate. Formal comparative evaluation is not required for these grades, but the principle of comparative evaluation is followed in selection for promotion.

During 1973 the Agency reviewed and revised its system of personnel administration. The Management Committee adopted in early 1974 the report of the Personnel Approaches Study Group (PASG) which stated that among other duties, each Deputy Director should determine structures, policies and guidances that would be most appropriate to meet his career service needs. Among the list of 16 responsibilities assigned to the Deputies was: "Develop and establish uniform promotion criteria." This decentralization of responsibilities was then embodied in

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Following the adoption of the report of the study group, some differences in promotion mechanisms and procedures have persisted in order to meet particular needs within Directorates. As the DDO was the first Directorate to develop a system of boards and panels for comparative evaluation, it has developed a more formal system than the other Directorates. This system is based upon Directorate-wide boards for grade groups (GS-08-12, 13, 14, 15/16) and functional panels within boards. Evaluations are performed annually. Panel members are

allotted a set period of time, during which they are released from other duties, to perform the evaluation. Some panel members are brought back from overseas. One avowed purpose of the rankings is for recommendations for promotion. The Directorate has prepared specific statements of the requirements that must be met to establish promotion eligibility according to grade and functional class.

In other Directorates, the board/panel structure is based upon the functionally differentiated office structure. Generally, promotion review is semi-annual rather than annual. As a rule, members of boards and panels are not sequestered from other duties for a set period of time. In both the DDS&T and the DDI, the boards are advisory to the Office Head with respect to promotion recommendations. Promotion criteria have not been developed in explicit detail as in the DDO, although some career sub-groups (offices) are moving in this direction. Some offices use formal rating systems to develop rankings.

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In all Directorates (career services), time-in-grade norms are used for the guidance of promotion review, but   is adhered to in relation to the policy that time-in-grade guidelines should not constrain exceptional performers. Some 10 percent of senior promotions (GS-14-16) were given after fewer than two years in grade; this percentage was only six in the DDO. There is significant variation among Directorates in the guidelines. For promotion to GS-12, the DDS&T shows 18 months while DDI shows a "median" of 32 months (1974 experience as published in handbook); for promotion to GS-14, the DDS&T shows 30 months while the DDI shows a "median" of 44 months. In 1976 the average time in grade for an officer promoted to GS-14 was 49 months in the DDS&T and 56 months in the DDI.

All Directorates are constrained by promotion headroom, but this constraint is more severe upon Directorates that have undergone disproportionate reductions in ceiling such as the DDO has experienced. Another consequence is a disproportionate "aging" since the DDO has had to restrict its inflow of young officers. In consequence, the average age of a DDO officer is two years greater than his counterpart elsewhere in the Agency. The DDO also has a disproportionately low share of senior officers under age 40 for the same reason; and, though the Agency has 10 supergrades aged under 40, the DDO has none (December 1976).

The impact of low attrition rates on promotion rates is severe. During 1976 only two percent of the DDO's GS-15's could be promoted to GS-16; only 10 percent of the GS-14's could be promoted to GS-15. In the DDI, the comparable figures were six percent and 14 percent. This situation would be severely aggravated by reductions of higher graded positions, but could be alleviated by involuntary retirement of eligible officers.

The key to improving the credibility of the board/panel system among employees probably lies in making quite explicit the criteria employed for promotion selections and in establishing the validity of these criteria. Where the criteria are not stated, or are vague and general, or do not appear to be relevant, the employee will be suspicious that promotions are based on "who you know." To comply with the new regulation on promotion policy, the boards/panels must move to make explicit the basis for selection.